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ABSTRACT

In accordance with the goal of gathering and disseminating information on early childhood, Community Coordinated Child Care conducted a survey of day care centers, day care homes, and preschool programs in Louisville and Jefferson County, Kentucky. The purpose of the survey was to obtain facts pertaining to characteristics of programs, directors, staffs, working conditions, wages, benefits, and factors related to professional development and strengths. The sample included 139 facilities representing 139 directors, approximately 1,350 workers, and 7,900 children. Findings substantiated the plight of early childhood professionals in the area and further documented the national crisis in child care. Even though workers were found to be well educated, they received low wages and very few benefits. Dissatisfaction over these issues led to high turnover rates. Concluding discussion recommends that: (1) governmental child care subsidy programs and payments for such services be greatly increased; (2) specific governmental policies with appropriate funding should be developed for the area of high quality early childhood education; and (3) employers should increase their involvement in child care for their employees. (RH)

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SURVEY OF EARLY CHILDHOOD PROFESSIONALS IN LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY

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ABSTRACT

Community Coordinated Child Care (4-C) surveyed preschool facilities in Louisville, Kentucky. Information is reported on characteristics of programs, directors, staffs, working conditions and professional development. Problems between quality of care and staff turnover rates are discussed, along with possible solutions.

ABSTRACT

In accordance with one of its goals to gather and disseminate information on early childhood, Community Coordinated Child Care (4-C) conducted a survey of day care centers, day care homes, and preschool programs in Louisville and Jefferson County, Kentucky. The purpose was to obtain facts on characteristics of programs, directors, staffs, working conditions, wages, benefits, and factors related to professional development and strengths. The sample included 139 facilities representing 139 directors, approximately 1,350 workers, and 7,900 children.

The study supported other similar research in showing that wages and benefits were poor. Over 83% of all workers earned less than $5.00 per hour; 70% had no health insurance; 81% had no retirement plans available, and 48% did not receive paid sick days. Staff turnover rates were, therefore, high. Approximately 63% worked less than 3 years and 24% indicated they were on the job less than one year. The staffs were, however, well educated. Forty percent of directors and 18% of staffs were college graduates. Seventy-eight percent of the directors and 47% of staffs had some college.

The low pay and poor benefits of early childhood professionals, even though well educated, lead to high turnover rates which undermine the stability and dependability of services to children and families. Quality of care suffers. Because of changes in our society, relative to mothers in the workforce, the number of children needing early childhood services is extremely high. Therefore, child advocates, educators, governmental officials, businesses, and parents must voice their concern. Steps to remedy the situation include more involvement by federal, state, and local governments in early childhood issues. Employers must also become more committed to providing assistance with child care to their employees.

INTRODUCTION

Child advocates, educators, governmental officials, parents, the corporate community, labor unions, and many other groups are alarmed and voicing concern about various issues relevant to early childhood education. One of the major concerns is the link between "quality" in child care and other preschool programs and the "status" of early childhood professionals in relation to salary, benefits, turnover rates, education, and general job satisfaction. Research clearly shows the connections between experienced staff, and effective programs. In order to recruit and maintain qualified staff, pay and benefits must be in keeping with responsibilities. Poor pay, lack of benefits, and stressful working conditions often deter qualified people from entering and staying in the field (Whitebook & Pettygrove, 1983). High turnover rates of teachers in early childhood undermine the stability and dependability of services available to children and families.

Changes in our society, such as the tremendous increase in working and single mothers, have made it necessary that more and more children are in early childhood programs or day care facilities. In the United States, there are over 12.8 million married couples with both parents working and 3.5 million single mothers who work (U. S. Department of Labor, 1988). This means approximately 9.9 million children under the age of five may need some kind of early childhood programs. The education and care of the

majority of America's youngest children are no longer in the hands of mothers, but rather with early childhood professionals and other care givers. Our changing society has created a critical need for early childhood workers, but low wages and professional status leads individuals to seek other more lucrative employment (Whitebook, 1986).

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), as well as other groups, assert that we must gather information on early childhood programs and their work forces. In order to successfully change policies relevant to the status of early childhood education, basic data must be obtained through surveys and other measures (Phillips & Whitebook, 1986). The need for a comprehensive, national data base is critical. Also essential are local surveys which help raise the consciousness of policy makers and the public as a whole. Such information provides hard facts for decision making and enlists the support of parents and the community (Whitebook & Pettygrove, 1983).

Community Coordinated Child Care (4-C) of Louisville and Jefferson county, Kentucky is a non-profit Metro United Way Agency which coordinates a number of different services for young children. One of its purposes is to gather and disseminate information on early childhood. In keeping with this aim, 4-C conducted a survey of early childhood professionals in the Louisville area. Information from the survey provided the community with basic data pertinent to its young children and the status

of the work force in early childhood. Additionally, the study contributed knowledge to the national picture.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Other research consistently demonstrates the problems associated with the early childhood work force. Salaries are low; there are few benefits; and working conditions are generally poor. Turnover rates are, therefore, quite high. Yet, the demand and the number of individuals employed, most of whom are women, are substantial. In 1984, over one million individuals defined their employment as "child care worker" and 330,000 indicated they were prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers (NAEYC, 1985). Approximately one-half of these persons were between the ages of 18 and 34 and 25% to 38% were 35 to 54 years old.

Contrary to popular myths, child care employees are <u>not</u> poorly educated. The average educational attainment level of workers is 14.6 years, and the majority of them have some college education (Institute for Women's Policy Research, 1986). A Michigan study (Washtenaw County Association for the Education of Young Children [AEYC], 1986) reported 76% of child care teachers possessed a bachelor's degree or better. Only 7% had no education related to child care.

<u>Salaries</u>

Persons who take care of animals, bartenders, parking lot and amusement park attendants all make more than those

employed in child care (NAEYC, 1987). Prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers in private and public schools earn more than child care workers, but are still paid less than the average earnings for all occupations. A 1987 national study conducted by "Child Care Center" magazine, reported that child care teachers' salaries varied greatly, but were low (Stout, 1988). Approximately 39% earned less than $5.00 and an additional 36% earned less than $7.00 per hour.

Other studies report similar findings (BANANAS, 1976; Minnesota Association for the Education of Young Children, 1987; Washtenaw County AEYC, 1986). In 1984, the median annual income for full-time child care workers was $9,204 (NAEYC, 1986). The average yearly earnings for prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers was $15,648.

Benefits

Fringe benefits, so common to most employment positions, are not the rule for early childhood professionals. Health benefits are provided to only about one-half of all child care providers (NAEYC, 1985). Less than 20% participate in a retirement plan. Only one-third of day care centers in the Michigan study received paid vacation days (Washtenaw County AEYC, 1986). All benefits were greater in a California study because of inclusion of school district employees (BANANAS, 1986).

Working Conditions

The quality of the work environment is an important

variable in any employment. Conditions for the early childhood work force, however, are poor. For example, approximately one-third of child care workers are not paid for overtime (Institute for Women's Policy Research, 1986). Other working conditions causing stress are lack of job descriptions, no written contracts, and no evaluation procedures (BANANAS, 1986; Washtenaw County AEYC, 1986).

Turnover Rates

Because of the above dilemmas, the turnover rate in day care and other preschool programs is extremely high. The U. S. Department of Labor estimates that 40% of staff in child care centers and 60% or staff in family day care homes leave their job each year (NAEYC, 1985). Between 1980 and 1990, 42% of all child care workers in educational and service positions will need to be replaced in order to maintain the current supply of providers.

This turnover rate has a tremendous impact on the quality of early childhood programming (Zinsser, 1986). Crucial bondings between young children and care givers are disrupted. Classroom routines are continually changing which disturbs the stability young children need. When vacancies cannot be filled immediately, other staff must increase their responsibilities which often creates more stress and possible turnovers.

METHOD

To obtain local data on the above and other issues, a survey form was developed using suggestions from the Child Care Employee Project (Whitebook & Pettygrove, 1983). Information was obtained on 1) characteristics of early childhood programs in the area, 2) characteristics of directors of programs, 3) characteristics of staffs, 4) working conditions and benefits (hours worked, salaries, etc.), and 5) factors related to professional development and strengths.

Questionnaires were sent to 273 licensed child care facilities (day care centers and day care homes) in Jefferson County, Kentucky and to 35 preschool programs located in private schools or churches. All participants were assured on anonymity and the forms were to be completed by the directors of the programs. Approximately one week after receiving the survey, each facility was contacted by phone and asked if they had returned the questionnaire. If the respondent had not, they were requested to please do so.

RESULT

There were 139 surveys returned with a response rate of 45%. According to the Child Care Employee Project (Whitebook & Pettygrove, 1983), a 30% response rate for mailed surveys is considered good in the child care field. Table 1 shows the types of facilities responding. Generally, a good sample

of the various programs offered in the area was obtained. However, it was probably somewhat biased toward those facilities offering better wages and benefits and therefore quality programming. Those types of centers, homes, and preschools would be more likely to respond to a survey. Approximately 7,900 preschool children were represented as being served by the participating programs. The sample included 139 directors and approximately 1,350 early childhood workers.

Table 1

Types of Facilities Represented in the Survey

Type Facility	Number responding	Percent
Non-profit nursery school (church sponsored, etc.)	20	14.4
Non-profit day care	29	20.9
Non-profit combined school/day care	14	10.1
For-profit day care	14	10.1
For-profit combined school/day care	37	26.6
Private day care home	17	12.2
Other	8	5.7
	139	100.0

Characteristics of Early Childhood Programs

Over 92% of respondents indicated they were licensed. The number of children served in the various age groups reflected general knowledge of licensed facilities in the area. For example, 17% were infants/toddlers, 59% were age 2 through 4 years, and 15% were five years. The under representation of five year old children indicates high

usage of public school kindergarten programs. Somewhat surprisingly, 59% of respondents indicated they serve infants.

The numbers of teachers represented for each age group of children being served were also reflective of general licensing knowledge as were operating hours. Most (75%) were open 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The number operating only half days corresponded to those indicating that type of program. Only 8% said they were open evening hours.

Less than one-half (42%) indicated they were accessible to the handicapped. Those facilities responding that they would accept special needs children were 68% yes, 21% no, and 11% unsure. Fifty-one percent reported they participated in the child care food program.

Characteristics of Directors

Most all (98%) of the directors were female, and 86% were white and 14% were black. Age categories were fairly evenly distributed as follows: 21 - 25 years 4%, 26 - 35 years 25%, 36 - 45 years 41%, 46 - 55 years 14%, 56 - 65 14%, and over 65 1%. Forty percent of all the directors had a bachelor's degree or better and over 78% had some college. Approximately 39% reported they had from 11 to 20 years of experience in early childhood, and 29% said they had from 5 to 10 years experience.

Characteristics of Staffs

Most all of the work force in the study were female.

Less than 1% were male. Eighty-one percent were white, 19% black, and 3% other. These percentages reflect the general ethnic makeup of the area. Ages of the staffs represented were not as young as expected. The following age categories were reported: less than 21 years - 11%, 21 to 25 years - 16%, 26 to 35 years - 30%, 36 to 45 years - 23%, 46 to 55 years - 13%, 56 to 65 years 6%, and over 65 - 1%. Fifty-one percent worked full time, 37% worked 15 to 29 hours, and 11% worked less than 15 hours per week.

The reported education levels of the staffs support other studies which show workers are not poorly educated. Over 18% of the individuals (not including the directors) represented in the survey had a bachelors degree or better. Approximately 47% had some college. As a whole, however, they were not well educated in early childhood. Thirty-nine percent indicated they had no training in the field.

The turnover rate for workers, as expected, was high. Over 63% reported being on the job for less than 3 years and 78% less than 5 years. Approximately 24% said they had worked in the field for only one year.

Working Conditions

Generally, the work force in early childhood education in the Louisville area reflect national trends. Over 65% indicated they work with no written contracts, although 85% reported their facilities do have written job

descriptions. Approximately 73% said they have specific employee evaluation procedures, and 70% have some type of salary advancement in place. However, the hours worked, salaries, and benefits pictures appeared more bleak.

Hours Worked. Over 35% of the work force reported they are on the job for greater than 40 hours per week. Most (92%) indicated they do receive breaks.

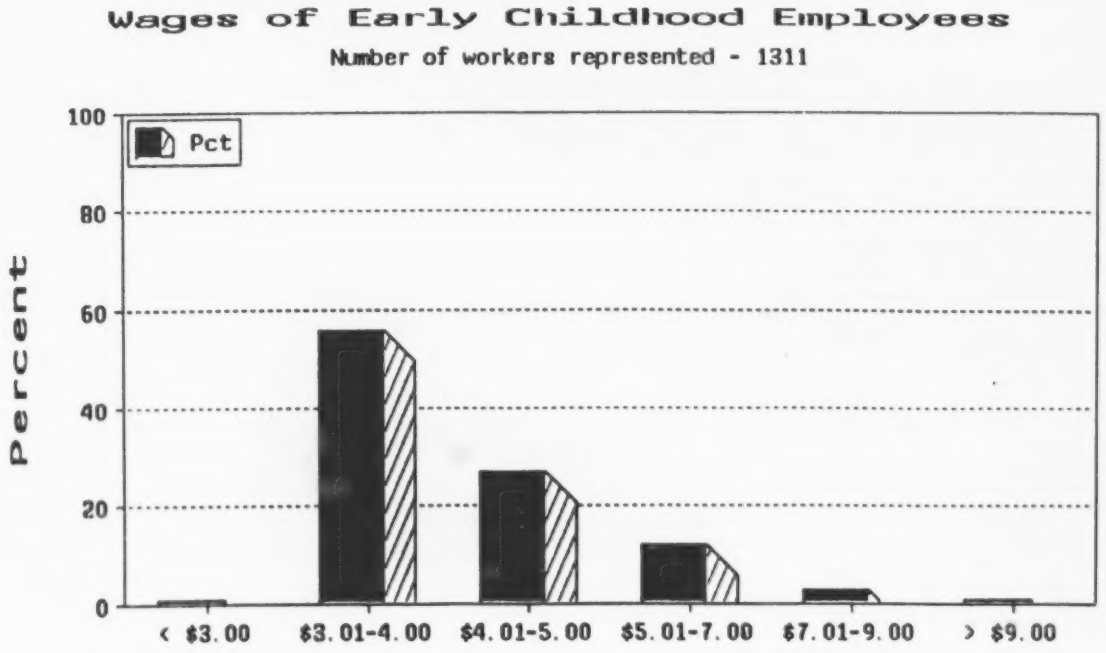
Salaries. Over 83% of the individual workers represented by the survey earn less than $5.00 per hour and 95% earn less than $7.00. Graph 1 depicts the salary ranges for staffs in the study. Sixty-two percent of the directors indicated they earn less than $7.00 per hour, 20% earn between $7.01 and $9.00, and approximately 17% make over $9.00 per hour.

Benefits. Approximately 70% of the sample indicated they offer no health insurance plans, and 81% have no retirement plans available. Only about one-half (52%) said they provide paid sick days. However, 75% of the facilities reported they have paid holidays and 66% have paid vacation days. Graph 2 shows benefits provided by those surveyed.

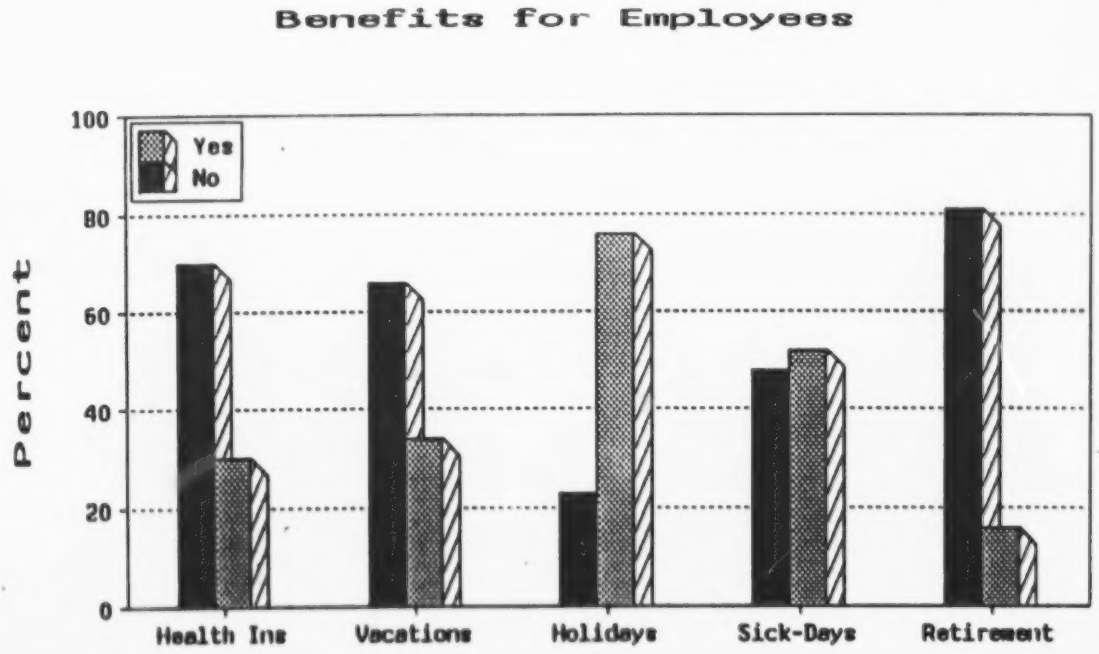
Professional Development and Strengths

Close to three-fourths of the facilities reported they have staff meetings at least once a month. Only about one-half indicated they had written policies requiring early childhood education/training for their teachers. Over 86%, however, required inservice training and 76% provided release time for such endeavors. Eighty percent provided tuition for conferences.

When asked to rate their employees on professional



Graph 1



Graph 2

knowledge and strengths, most directors seemed pleased with their staffs. Table 2 shows the percent of staffs receiving the highest or next to highest rating on a scale of five for specific early childhood skill areas.

Table 2

Ratings on Professional Knowledge and Strengths of Staffs

Skill Area	% highest or next to highest
Understands developmental needs of young children	75%
Knowledge of appropriate physical environment for children	83%
Knowledge of curriculum planning for children	73%
Can establish long/short range goals for children	66%
Competent in classroom management (discipline)	83%
Effectiveness with parents of preschool children	81%

CONCLUSIONS

The study substantiated the plight of early childhood professionals in the area and added further documentation to the national crisis in child care. Even though workers are well educated, they receive low wages and very few benefits. Dissatisfaction over these issues leads to high turnover rates. Constant changes in staffs affect the quality of programming and undermines the stability and dependability of services to children and families.

The repercussions from this loss of quality services for young children eventually affect every segment of our society. Businesses suffer because of employee stress and

absenteeism when child care arrangements are inadequate or fail. Mothers may simply have no choice but to quit their jobs altering the financial security of the family and decreasing their buying power. In the case of single mothers, their only solution may be to resort to governmental subsistence costing everyone tax dollars. Most importantly, this nation's most valuable resource, its children, often suffer from inadequate or poor quality in programming. Costs to society in educational remediation could be staggering.

Changes in our society demand the use of early childhood programs by most families in this country with young children. This utilization is projected to only increase even further. It is imperative, then, that child advocates, educators, governmental officials, businesses, and parents voice their concern about the issues surrounding the difficulties faced by the early childhood profession. Far reaching reforms must be initiated. These reforms can only occur with substantial increase in the awareness and participating of businesses and government in early childhood programming.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Governmental child care subsidy programs and payments for such services should be greatly increased. Much of the burden of providing services for low-income children has been assumed by child care workers in the form of low wages and poor benefits (Zinsser, 1986).

Increases in child care payments by federal, state, and local governments for poor children would allow facilities to remedy some of the wage and benefit problems.

2. Specific governmental policies with appropriate funding to initiate such policies should exist relative to early childhood education and quality programming. The need for early childhood education is now a fact in our society. The magic ages of 5 or 6 and educational policies beginning only at those ages are no longer relevant in our society. Teacher turnover rates as high as 42% should be unacceptable for any age group of American children.

3. Employers should increase their involvement in child care for their employees. The economic stability of most American families with young children now depends on the mother working. Benefits, compensations, and personnel policies should reflect this dependency. Corporate financial involvement eventually leads to a recognition that early childhood programs are not custodial functions, but a necessity in the overall productivity of this country. Employers who provide either on site or financial assistance with child care also assume some of the burden of services for their lower paid employees. Such measures could further remedy problems with wages and benefits of child care workers. Eventually the employers actually profit because of reduced employee stress and absenteeism.

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